



Knoxville LGBT Group Asks for Support In Wake of Tragedy

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by Steve Weinstein, New York Editor-In-Chief

In the wake of the horrific shooting inside the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church on Sunday, a local LGBT group is asking Knoxville Mayor Bill Haslam to acknowledge the city's community.

The church actively promotes GLBT support with groups and ministries. It was apparently targeted by the shooter, David Adkisson, because of its outreach. The police are considering federal hate crime charges against Jim him.

Local activist Gary Elgin asked Haslam to speak out more than he has in the past in an email, according to the Knoxville News Sentinel. "This is the time for you to actually and sincerely stand by us, as well as this tragedy's victims, their families and all the citizens of Knoxville who value basic human rights and liberties," wrote Elgin, former director of the Rainbow Community Awareness Project. "This is the time for you, when called upon, to answer and step up and be counted as our mayor as well."

Haslam responded to the email with a show of support. "It is often easy to make these tragic events, which are far too frequent, about the community in which they occur. Knoxville is a caring, compassionate city where diverse viewpoints are shared and respected. Every person, regardless of race, religion, age, sex, or sexual orientation, is a person of human dignity and a valued member of our community," he wrote.

Elgin said he is grateful for the mayor's "kind and inclusive" words.

Todd Cramer, with the Knoxville Human Rights Group and an organizer of last month's Knoxville PrideFest 2008, told the newspaper, "Regardless of the personal motivation behind this terrible tragedy, the focus at this time should not be why it was committed, but how we respond as a community."

Also Monday, Rea Carey, executive director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, issued a statement saying in part, "This attack is tragic, abominable and senseless. We pray and hope for comfort to the families of the victims and to the congregants of this welcoming church. Our deepest sympathies are with everyone affected by this terrible event. We condemn any crime motivated by hate or bias."